



Harbor seals hauled out on the log boom at Douglas Harbor

## **Snettisham 2007 – 12: Mixed Blessings September 7-10 (and Taku August 31-September 2)**

Over Labor Day weekend I took a well-deserved break from construction chaos and spent several days of limitless relaxation at the Taku cabin. Travis and I left work early to catch the 18.7' tide on Friday, passed a whale in Gastineau Channel, and cruised up the river with no problems. The strawberries were ripe, but heavily browsed/picked, the blueberries ripe but scarce, and the nagoonberries unripe but super abundant. I'd learned over the last two years that the nagoons ripen earliest upriver in the farthest patches from the cabin and there I managed to pick about nine cups of more or less ripe berries in one forage. I also mowed the meadows in front of the cabin in an effort to protect the strawberries from encroaching spruces and alders.

Other than those brief excursions, we ate, napped, read, and listened to the rain on the metal roof, and it was wonderful. One small female black bear came around just as we were packing up, browsing on blueberries and strawberries on her way to checking out the stone BBQ where we'd cooked salmon the night before. An hour before high tide on Sunday we cruised back to town under a glorious blue September sky on a calm sea.



The *Ronquil* at anchor in the River, Taku Glacier behind



Black bear

Unfortunately, my relaxation temporarily came to an end and I spent the rest of the week in frantic preparation for the coming weekend when we were to head back to Snettisham with Travis's mother who was coming to town for a visit. Other than the basic food, gas, and packing preparations, I ran around town procuring a propane tank, gas lights, copper tubing, and the accessories necessary to install propane lights, as well as what I hoped was the right fitting to finish off the faucet. Travis purchased a small pipe cutter and a flaring tool that I borrowed to install the light and my dad taught me how to flare and secure the copper.



The *Ronquil* all loaded up at the harbor

At last Friday arrived and after a few hours at work I left and went home to finish packing. Nigel and I hauled two carts of goods down to the boat to join the gear I'd loaded the night before, pumped out the night's rain, and took off at 11:15 am in anticipation of three foot seas. The seas were, in fact, not so bad, but I was committed to taking it easy for both Nigel and I, so we spent about three hours getting there, my mind wandering hopelessly the entire way. A whale blew in the middle of Stephen's Passage next to a huge blue ice berg north of Snettisham

and at least five more came up as we continued, three inside the calm of the Port.

Arriving at the homestead, I unloaded the gear and the dog onto the beach and took one load up to the lodge. There I grabbed the red kayak from under the porch, dragged it down to the water, tied it off to the skiff, and shoved off the beach. The *Ronquil's* engine died quickly as I backed away—I'd run out of gas in the main tank just seconds away from anchoring! I hurriedly switched tanks, dropped the anchor 50 feet from shore, let out plenty of line, tied it off, and backed down with the engine until the anchor caught. Then I climbed aboard *Tsaa*, the red kayak, and paddled to shore where Nigel met me with exuberance, trying to play while I drug the kayak above the high tide line and tipped it over in the grass before returning to haul the rest of the gear to the lodge. (That's standard procedure for arrival at the homestead.)

Before the others arrived I unpacked a little, lit a fire, and added some lime and a grocery bag garbage can to the new outhouse (it's the small things, right?). At about 3:15 I heard a loud, rapidly approaching engine and came outside to in time to see a camera flash through the window of Tal Air's Cessna 206. Travis and his mother Carolyn had chartered a flight down to the homestead to start their adventure. Nigel watched eagerly from the edge of the water as the plane approached. Jacque brought it up to the muddy beach, dropped his passengers, said a quick hello, and took off for town.

After we made our way up the beach, Travis and I showed Carolyn around the property and dropped her gear in Cottonwood Cabin before settling in at the lodge. Before dinner, we attempted to plumb water to the sink (actually Travis did most of the work). It turns out I had bought the correct fitting to connect the hose to the filters outside, but we couldn't get a water tight seal under the sink and eventually abandoned the effort until next spring. I also cleaned up the area behind the lodge, screwing hooks into the wall to hang the filters.



Nigel watching the plane



Filters hung up above the propane tank for the range

That evening and the next day it rained fiercely virtually non-stop and we did little but relax inside, chatting and reading and, once, playing scrabble. Oh, and eating too! Travis and I did take a break in the afternoon and managed to successfully install two gas lights, one over the stove and sink and the other against the east wall behind the couch. Travis did attractive things with the copper pipe and the lights worked beautifully. At this time of year, cooking at any time of day requires artificial light to see (we've been using a flashlight). The gas lights are pretty and cheerful, and bright enough to read by. I finished the last Harry Potter book that evening.

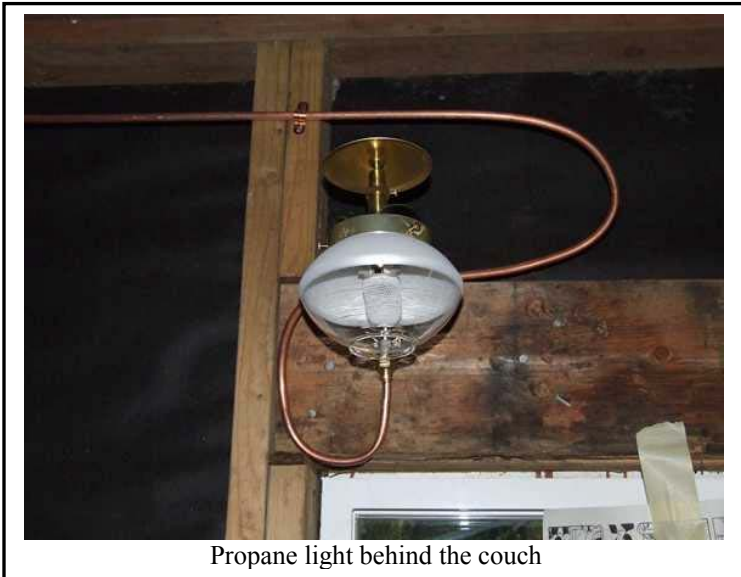


Nigel contemplating his next scrabble move



Travis and Nigel draining the boat at low tide in the rain

Sunday cleared a little and we headed out for a boat ride after breakfast. Our first stop was a whale near the mining ruins in the entrance to the Port, then the World's Perfect Eagle's Nest (there was even an immature eagle perched nearby) and then we pursued a pair of whales into Stephen's Passage. This last mission we eventually abandoned when the seas hit three feet, sadly leaving the whales behind. On the way back we cruised the shore on the east side, admiring the brilliant green, yellow and red foliage spilling out from among the spruces and hemlocks over the gray rocks and the glassy green water. We made a quick stop at the mining ruins to show Carolyn the pyrite laden creek and pick up some samples. In the cliff nearby I found a vein of pyrite sparkling in the rock. (Actually it turns out this may not be pyrite, but close enough for now.)



Propane light behind the couch



The kitchen

Around the corner in Gilbert Bay we shut down and listened for the whale again, but didn't find him until we'd started to head toward Sweetheart Creek. We waited again once after he fluked, but the whale was elusive and never reappeared so we cruised over to the Sweetheart flats until we had a view of the waterfalls before heading back to the homestead. While the others stayed in the lodge, I did a tour of the cabins, making fruitless efforts to secure them from water seepage over the winter. The floors of three of the cabins soak up water outside which seeps in and stains the plywood, keeping the interiors damp. I'm not exactly sure why this happens but the more I looked at the conditions, the more I realized that I did not have the materials on hand to fix it. I filled what cracks I could and decided I'd just have to wait until spring. Later that afternoon, Travis and I bundled up the first outhouse under a tarp for the winter and cut a piece of plywood for a small countertop between the range and the sink.

In the afternoon the *Alaskan* steamed into view ready to take us home the next day, having bucked four foot seas all the way down. The three of us kayaked out and chatted with my parents for a while before returning to the lodge for dinner. Later, as we prepared to head to our cabins for bed, I stepped onto the porch to put some perishables away in the cooler and heard heavy rustling in the bushes below. It was nearly pitch dark

and I figured it was probably only a porcupine, but I grabbed a flashlight anyway and looked. Two bright gold eyes shone back from the face of a bear. I alerted the others and we had a chaotic few moments while we tried to get Nigel inside, get light on the bear, and take photos all at once. The bear was eating gray currents in the bushes about 20 feet away and was good enough to linger there, then step out of the bushes and pause so we

all got a superb view of her before she wandered slowly away. She (or possibly he) was a medium sized cinnamon bear with a dark, glossy coat that was reddish on top. Clearly well fed. Too dark for photos, though. We walked to our cabins somewhat cautiously afterwards and watched Nigel try to sniff her out.

Though the clouds had begun to break up on Sunday, the rains started in earnest again that night, keeping us up as it pinged violently on the roof. After breakfast I noticed that the pipes under the sink were leaking and went outside to take a look.

What I found was a distinct lack of

an olive barrel in the middle of the gray water system. It was not only disconnected from the plumbing, it was nowhere to be seen. The lid had been neatly unscrewed and left behind, the drain pipe leading to the drainage field pulled off, and one of the filter bags lay on the ground.

Our black bear had returned in the night.

Before we worried about that, Travis and I set about finishing the winterization of the property. We boarded up the picture window, covered the second outhouse with a tarp, stripped the beds of linens, locked the cabins, took down the



Gray water system sans olive barrel



Wet rainforest on the way up to the creek (devil's club in foreground)



Olive barrel found (back of lodge is visible top center)

stove pipe, etc. We also hiked up to the creek and pulled the olive barrel there out of the water. On the way down, Travis spotted a trail heading up the mountain from behind the lodge and saw the missing olive barrel. It sat on the hillside a good 50 yards from the back of the lodge, heavily chewed in places, with all the fittings inside missing completely. I kicked it down the mountain to the lodge, but didn't bother to put it back in place. So much for my gray water system!

But, what can you do? Next summer I'll have to install a bear-proof box. We drained the water out of the drinking water system, took the filters inside, packed up our food, covered the windows with newspapers to keep the birds from hitting them, and packed our gear down to the water. Travis kayaked out to get the boat and we loaded up and headed out to the *Alaskan* where we secured the *Ronquil* with a tow line. After a lunch

of quesadillas I napped a little in the salon before my folks dropped Travis and I off at Douglas Harbor to return the *Ronquil* to her slip. We met up with them later in Aurora Harbor where we picked up our gear and Carolyn and headed home for showers.

So, the homestead is buttoned up for the year. The foul weather I found myself in late last September has made me wary of fall travel. And, while curling up on the couch in front of the wood stove and gazing out the picture window at Gilbert Bay still sounds fantastic, all inspiration for construction has evaporated. It's time for winter.



Debbie at the head of the water system